

Sounds of Power and Community: The Meanings of Band Music in New Hampshire

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I. Introduction

Until the early decades of the twentieth century, bands made up of wind and percussion instruments were an indispensable part of musical life in the New England region of the northeastern United States. In this paper I offer an interpretive historical survey of brass band and other wind band activity in the colony and state of New Hampshire, with particular attention to the coastal city of Portsmouth, but with some attention also to the broader context of bands and ideas about bands in other parts of New England. My purpose is to shed some light on the social and cultural meanings of bands and band performances, which I see as living symbols playing a variety of roles in the lives of towns, states, armies, and nations. By drawing together information about the types of bands that existed in New Hampshire over the course of almost three centuries, where and why they performed, and how people responded to those performances, I try to gain some insights into the complex and shifting meanings of bands to the generations of people who heard them and played in them.

The instrumentation of bands changed considerably over time, making terminology somewhat difficult. Here I will use the word “band” or “wind band” to refer to any ensemble made up of some combination of wind instruments and percussion. “Brass band” will refer to a band that uses only brass instruments and percussion (i. e. no woodwind instruments), while “military band” will refer to a band of any kind that is employed by a military organization or used for military purposes.

Key words: wind band, brass band, military band, New Hampshire

As Benjamin Anderson (1991) has argued, modern nations can be seen as “imagined communities,” formed through a shared national consciousness that is propagated especially through print and other media, and through the workings and movements of bureaucratic functionaries. I would suggest further that not only nations, but states or provinces within a nation and even towns and villages are largely imagined communities. These smaller-scale communities are formed not only through actual contact and interaction among the members of the community, but also, and perhaps primarily, through symbols, ideas and feelings about their community that the members more or less share. Anderson argues convincingly that the British and Spanish colonies in the Americas, through their independence movements, were the real birthplaces of modern nationalism, preceding and strongly influencing European nationalisms (see Anderson 1991, especially pp.47–65). But I also find convincing Zuckerman’s argument (1970) that some aspects of the political consciousness that formed the United States developed first in the towns of New England, in town meetings where the primary goal was to maintain the peace of the community and avoid internal conflict, through consensus where possible. The larger imagined community of thirteen colonies unified into a nation was thus preceded by, and strongly influenced by, a consciousness of local community that had been forming since the seventeenth century. Before the United States began to be imagined, New England towns spent over a century learning how to imagine themselves. This self-consciousness of New England towns, furthermore, continued to develop after the Revolution and to interact closely with the developing nationalism of the United States.

This period of the formation of American nationalism and its interaction with local community consciousness - roughly the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries - coincides with the rise and flourishing of modern wind bands. These bands, in military, civilian, professional and amateur forms, played vital symbolic roles in the imagining of American communities at every level, from the village up to the nation. In particular, I will argue that bands functioned in various ways as symbols of power and symbols of community.

Three essential features of a band give it its effectiveness as a symbol of power or authority: it is *uniformed*, *loud*, and *mobile*. The uniforms give a band the appearance of a military organization (which indeed it is, in many cases), and like other kinds of uniforms they convey an impression of unity and resolute purpose emanating from some central authority. The loud volume of a band enables it to be heard out-of-doors over a considerable distance, thus making it a sonic symbol of power over territory: the authority that it represents is symbolically projected over the area within which it can be heard. The mobility of a band further enhances its aura of territorial authority: as the band advances it occupies entire streets, which have to be cleared of traffic to make way for it; it carries its sonic power relentlessly forward, projecting volleys of sound from the shoulders of uniformed, marching musicians.

But there is also a kinder, gentler side to the band phenomenon, suggested by the widespread use of the word “harmony” in expressions such as “social harmony.” A town’s

brass band, performing on a bandstand on the green or in front of the courthouse, signifies the shared values and the peaceful coexistence of the town's inhabitants. In this context the band's uniforms suggest the unity of the town's people, their shared identity, while the projection of the music through outdoor space creates an aural sense of the territory that the town occupies. If you are in Fisherville when the Fisherville Cornet Band is playing, you can hear it from anywhere in town, and this enhances your consciousness of being *in* Fisherville. A community band is both a visual and an aural symbol of the community itself. By extension, a band of national stature that tours the country, playing patriotic tunes at outdoor concerts, becomes a symbol of the entire nation as an extended community.

I suggest that there is a continuum between these two clusters of meanings, between the band as a symbol of power and the band as a symbol of community. The "power" aspect comes to the foreground in the close association of bands with military organizations: a military band signifies military power, with both positive and negative connotations, both to those who approve of such power and to those who do not. The "community" aspect appears especially in the phenomenon of town bands, musical groups that draw their members from the community, and that represent an ideal of order and "harmony" in community life. But the military/civilian dichotomy does not align perfectly with the power/community continuum. In some cases, the coercive power of a town or village community over the lives of its members can be represented by a band, or by specific band instruments used to issue orders. Military bands, on the other hand, are not used only for projecting symbolic power; they also provide shared entertainment and a sense of harmonious community to the soldiers of a military unit, and this role is deeply appreciated by soldiers who are enduring the stresses of war. National military bands, moreover, function simultaneously as symbols of the national community *and* of its military power.

Not only their symbolic meanings, but also their institutional affiliations and the careers of their individual members have tended to place bands in a cultural borderland between the civilian and military worlds. Town bands have at times been transformed into military bands, and vice versa, while innumerable individual musicians have moved back and forth between the two types in the course of their careers.

New Hampshire, although overshadowed by neighboring Massachusetts in population and cultural influence, has a remarkably rich history of bands and band music. These bands have, I think, played a crucial role in fostering the ideas and especially the emotions through which New Hampshire communities have imagined themselves. Their role as symbols of towns and villages continued through the early twentieth century, interacting with other roles that signified other levels of community: the army regiment or brigade, the state, even the nation as a whole in the international arena. Although their role has diminished markedly since the early twentieth century, they remain active and important in some towns. But now instead of (or in addition to) symbolizing the present peace and harmony of the town, they represent its distinct identity primarily by evoking its history, as the "golden age" of band music has receded into the past and as the past has become central to the self-images that

New Hampshire towns have constructed for themselves.

I begin with a look at the European precedents of American military music and the origins of bands in New Hampshire.

II. Colonial Times and the Revolution

From the seventeenth century, drums and trumpets were the leading signal instruments in European militaries. Drums maintained a beat for marching and transmitted officers' signals, while trumpets, being easier to carry and play on horseback, were used for signaling in cavalry units. In the infantry, fifes added a melody to the marching beat of the drums. Militias in the British colonies adopted similar practices, with fife and drum corps in the infantry and trumpeters in the cavalry, using British signals and drilling routines (Camus 1998, p.152).

Music for military ceremonies and parades, as opposed to marching and signaling, was provided in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe by bands of "hoboys" or "hautboys" together with other wind instruments. The hautboy was a double-reed woodwind instrument, the ancestor of the modern oboe. This type of band also appeared in the American colonies by the early eighteenth century: in 1714, the *Boston News Letter* of 11-18 October reports a procession celebrating the coronation of King George I in which soldiers marched "with Hoboys and Trumpets before them." This seems to be the earliest written reference to an actual performance of band music in British America (ibid., p.154).

In New Hampshire, although documentation is scarce, European military music of some sort seems likely to have appeared not long after the first European settlers. Colonists first arrived in the Piscataqua River area in 1622 for purposes of fishing, trapping, and fur trading, and founded settlements that became the towns of Portsmouth and Dover. The first written reference to musical instruments appears only eleven years later, in 1633, when an inventory of household items mentions "15 recorders and hoeboys," while an inventory in the same year of a different household includes "hoeboys and recorders 26" as well as a drum. Other inventories of 1635 also mention drums, recorders, and hautboys under the category "Arms and Ammunition". Trumpets are recorded as early as 1683 in New Hampshire, where they were reportedly used at times as a "call to arms" (Pichierri 1960, pp.13-17).

These instruments may well have been used partly for entertainment. The settlers of New Hampshire were more religiously diverse, and more tolerant of pleasurable leisure activities, than the Puritans of Massachusetts to the south; and even the Puritans were not as cold and joyless, nor as vehemently opposed to music, as is commonly believed in the U. S. today (ibid., pp.6-11). But the large numbers of hautboys in these early New Hampshire inventories strongly suggest the presence of military-style bands, and their classification as "Arms and Ammunition" implies that they were intended to be used in some connection with military activities.

Drums, hautboys and trumpets, then, probably represented military power and discipline

in early colonial New Hampshire, just as they did in Europe. But it is important to recall that the drum and trumpet were signal instruments, used for training and for “field music” on the battlefield, separate from the bands of wind instruments (mainly hautboys) that were used for public military ceremony. Drums and trumpets thus conveyed a particular power, as instruments that were used to issue orders. The drum, moreover, had an official status that gave it a wider significance than the purely military: every town was required by law to have a drum, which was used to call the townspeople to assemble for worship or for other purposes (Pichierri 1960, p.14). From early colonial times, then, we can suppose that the drum represented the power of the town over its inhabitants: the sound of the drum was a command to assemble, to come together as a community, in particular for the religious worship that was the ideological core of the town’s existence.⁽¹⁾

Military music was associated with the militia, an important institution in the public life of colonial New England. Every able-bodied man was expected to take part in annual militia training, but two types of militias developed: the common militia, consisting of all men, and the volunteer militia, a more elite organization often led by prominent members of the community. The leaders of local society and politics were largely the same as the leaders of the local militia, which always played a role in public ceremonies and celebrations (Camus 1998, p.151). Thus military culture and public civil culture were closely intertwined. “Bands of Musick” (mainly hautboys) were hired directly by militia officers, for whom they also provided musical entertainment at social events. These same bands also played in public concerts for additional income, performing regularly for the general public at a time when almost no other instrumental ensemble music was available (ibid., pp.157–8).

In New Hampshire, the presence of large numbers of hautboys suggests that militia bands may have performed at public events from the early 17th century. But specific information is mostly lacking until the establishment of newspapers, beginning with the *New Hampshire Gazette*, first published by Daniel Fowle in Portsmouth in 1756 (Baenen 2002, p.65). From this time onward performances by “Bands of Musick” are commonly mentioned as accompanying public celebrations. In one early reference, “Drums and Music” are described as accompanying celebrations in Portsmouth when the Stamp Act was repealed in 1766 (Pichierri 1960, p.65). The repeal of the Stamp Act has been seen as a seminal event in the birth of a proto-national consciousness encompassing all the thirteen colonies, one of the first occasions when people from New Hampshire to Georgia all rejoiced together (see for example Trevelyan 1964, pp.1–2). One reason they were able to do so “together” is because the recent spread of newspapers had made people in the different colonies more aware of one another and of their common interests (Anderson 1991, pp.61–4). As newspapers provided the intellectual awareness, “Drums and Music” helped to provide the emotional drive behind this emerging national consciousness, in Portsmouth at least, and no doubt in other places as well.

During the Revolution, fife-and-drum corps provided “field music,” i. e. marching music and signaling for the infantry, while the cavalry used trumpeters for signaling, generally

following British models. In addition, some American (and British) regiments had bands of music, and band performances were common during and after the war (Camus 2001a, p.635). One of these was a concert held in Portsmouth in 1783 by the band of the Third Regiment of Continental Artillery, which performed “Overtures, Symphonies, Military Music, several Songs, and several Duettoes on the French Horns.” Advertised in the *New Hampshire Gazette*, this was the first documented public concert in the city of Portsmouth (Pichierri 1960, p.112; Camus 1998, 156-7). Also during this period French military bands, connected to the French units that assisted the American revolutionaries, made appearances in New Hampshire and in other colonies. In 1782 the French regiment of Viennois was in Portsmouth, and their band apparently performed there (Pichierri 1960, p.64). Thus New Hampshire residents were reminded that bands were not only local and national, but also international: a common musical language shared by European nations, and by their own emerging nation as well.

In the years following the Revolution, band music was a central component of celebrations relating to the new nation, the larger community of which New Hampshire was now a part. In 1788, when news reached Portsmouth that the new U.S. constitution had been ratified, festivities were held that included “A Band of Music in an open Coach and six horses decorated.” The band later accompanied the singing of patriotic songs, and entertained the assembled crowd from the balcony of the state house (Pichierri 1960, p.68). When George Washington, the president and living symbol of the nation, paid a visit to Portsmouth in 1789, he was welcomed by the citizens with a song accompanied by band music. Eleven years later, in January 1800, the news reached Portsmouth of Washington’s death, and public mourning rituals were immediately organized, including a procession with “drums muffled and Music in crape” (ibid., pp.70-1). In short, as soon as the “community” called the United States of America began to be imagined, virtually every event intended to evoke national joy or grief was accompanied by public performances of band music. Bands promoted the solidification of nationalist feeling at every turn.

In 1792 the new U.S. government passed the Militia Act, which made service in state militias mandatory for all free white men between eighteen and forty-five years of age. Civilian bands were attached to the militia units, and many new bands were formed in response to this demand. (Camus 1998, pp.157-8; 2001a, pp.635-6). The stage was thus set for a “golden age” (or more precisely perhaps, a brass age) of band music in the nineteenth century.

III. The Brass Band Movement Begins

During the mid to late eighteenth century, widespread fascination with Turkish Janissary bands exerted an influence on bands throughout Europe, and by the early 1800s interest in Turkish music was growing in the U.S. as well. European and American “Bands of Musick,” which had previously been centered on woodwind instruments without drums, now

adopted elements of Janissary-style percussion, especially the bass drum and cymbals, which have remained an essential part of band instrumentation up to the present day (Camus 1998, p.157; Flaes 2000, 25–6). At about the same time, the snare drums of field music began to be incorporated regularly into bands of music, while the diversity and number of wind instruments was increased to compensate for the volume of the newly added percussion (Camus 2001a, p.636). Thus the imperative power of field drums, with their long history of issuing marching orders, was now combined with the ceremonial pomp and flair of wind instruments and with the exoticism of Turkish percussion to produce the basic structure of the modern band.

Trumpets had been used as signal instruments for centuries, but only with the invention of the keyed bugle and valved instruments in the early nineteenth century did it become possible to play complex melodies on brass instruments with relative ease. A factory to produce such instruments began operations in Winchester, New Hampshire, in the 1830s — reportedly the first musical instrument factory in the U. S. (Proper 1998, p.165). In 1834 a movement began toward bands using entire families of keyed or valved brass instruments, with no woodwinds (Camus 2001a, p.636). Army infantry bands and many leading civilian bands switched their instrumentation to an all-brass format, and by 1856 one critic could write that “all is brass now-a-days — nothing but brass” (*Dwight’s Journal of Music*, quoted in Camus 2001b, p.643).

Civilian brass bands, both amateur and professional, were generally modeled on military bands, and proliferated rapidly. According to one estimate there were about 3000 bands in the U. S. by the end of the 1850s. The large number of amateur bands constituted a market for printed collections of band music, and helped to stimulate the emerging music publishing industry. Surviving collections include relatively easy-to-play arrangements of patriotic songs, marches, Stephen Foster songs, excerpts from operas, various types of dance tunes and other popular melodies. Professional bands gave regular concerts in cities and some towns, and helped to inspire the amateur band movement. Some of the best professional bands were based in New England, including the Salem Brass Band and the Boston Brass Band from Massachusetts, and the American Brass Band of Providence, Rhode Island (Camus 2001b, p.644).

Parades, almost always featuring brass bands, became a regular part of festivities on national holidays and other special public occasions. Such parades, as Roberts points out, “helped shape the identity of the new nation” through spectacles full of patriotic symbolism and panoramic depictions of historical events that were central to the emerging American mythology, such as Washington crossing the Delaware and the Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock (Roberts 2002, pp.35, 38–41). In New England especially, brass bands also played a major role in commemorative events through which the region sought to redefine itself as the U. S. expanded and the relative importance of New England declined: “Early nineteenth-century commemoratives were part of the ‘process of history making’ intended to create regional identity by transforming New England into the moral and cultural center of the

nation” (Candee 2002, p.47). The city of Portsmouth, in particular, was struggling to recreate itself: “By the middle of the nineteenth century, Portsmouth, New Hampshire had already begun to develop a civic identity that compensated for economic stagnation and declining political importance by stressing its historic and cultural legacy” (Baenen 2002, p.64). One sign of this process was the founding in 1817 of the Portsmouth Athenaeum, which became the leading repository of historical documents and center for historical research in the city (Candee 2002, p.49).

Portsmouth created its new historically-based identity in part through centennial celebrations. One of these was the so-called “centennial” (actually the bicentennial), held in 1823, of the first European settlements in New Hampshire. The bicentennial celebration on May 21 began with “the ringing of bells and discharge of artillery, which was continued at intervals through the day” (Candee 2002, p.53). A festive soundscape was thus produced by the loudest “instruments” available, bells and cannons, whose sound would carry to the furthest reaches of the town and beyond. There followed a procession of local militias, Masons and other organizations. Elizabeth Woodbury, the wife of governor-elect Charles Woodbury, watched the parade with her husband and children and wrote afterwards: “The children were enchanted, but beyond everything else, the Masons, the Uniform companies, & the display of men, women & children, Charles admired the Drums.” (ibid., p.54). It may or may not be a coincidence that this admirer of drums — musical symbols of authority that had once had the power to call assemblies in New Hampshire towns — had just been elected governor. In any case it is clear that drums played an assertive role in this public celebration of New Hampshire’s historical identity. (Whether the drums were accompanied by other instruments is not clear.) The day continued with the singing of many patriotic songs, as well as newly composed songs that praised the first settlers of the Piscataqua river area as brave pioneers comparable to the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth (ibid., pp.55-7). Thus a local historical mythology was being constructed on the model of the (also newly created) national historical mythology.

Another Portsmouth centennial celebration, held in 1856, commemorated the establishment in 1756 of a printing press and of New Hampshire’s first newspaper, the *New Hampshire Gazette*, by Daniel Fowle. The centennial brought several thousand spectators into the city to view a parade of voluntary and trade associations, the fire department, and a number of volunteer military companies. First among the latter was the Amoskeag Veterans from Manchester, accompanied by the Manchester Cornet Band, a first-rate local band led by Walter Dignam (Baenen 2002, p.72; Spicer 1999, p.29). Music was also provided by the Salem Brass Band, from Salem, Massachusetts, led by Patrick Gilmore and considered to be one of the best professional bands in the country (Camus 2001b, p.644; Baenen 2002, pp.73-5). Written descriptions of the parade waxed eloquent about the colorful uniforms of the military companies, but one can imagine that the music may have made an equally strong impression, though one less easy to express in print. After the parade, at a gathering in Jefferson Hall, “participants stressed the contributions of the press to the establishment and

maintenance of liberty, while tactfully avoiding its role in contemporary public life”, and Daniel Fowle himself, who had moved his press to Portsmouth a hundred years earlier after being charged with “seditious libel” in Boston, was praised as a hero in the fight for press freedom (Baenen 2002, p.75). This centennial, in other words, celebrated a man who was seen as a local embodiment of a national political ideal.

Centennial celebrations in Portsmouth, then, sought to create a local identity based on local history, but with strong references to the idealized historical and political identity of the United States that was also in the process of being created. Band music, played by bands of local or national fame, was an indispensable soundtrack to these celebrations, and helped to provide the emotional underpinnings for collective displays of local and national ideology. In this way the sight and sound of a band was itself integrated into public consciousness as an accompaniment to those ideologies, as a part of the very idea and image of town and nation.

In this context it is interesting to note that a band did not actually have to be *from* the U. S. in order to provide the necessary musical and visual grandeur to a celebration of U. S. nationalism. In the borderlands between U. S. New England and British territories to the north (which would later become Canada), where the population was sparse and a lively celebration required the combined efforts of everyone in a given area, American Independence Day festivities on July 4th were often supported by bands (as well as spectators) from the British side of the border. In 1859, for example, the Woodstock Brass Band (from Woodstock, New Brunswick, in British territory) performed a leading role in Fourth of July celebrations in Presque Isle, Maine. Also in the Maine-New Brunswick border region, the Saint Stephen Cornet Band (from New Brunswick) played in the nearby town of Calais, Maine at the Independence Day events of 1868 (Holman 2002, p.142). British Americans generally enjoyed and admired the July Fourth celebrations of the U. S., and after the Dominion of Canada was formed in 1867, annual celebrations of Dominion Day (July 1) in the border region were largely modeled on U. S. Independence Day events, with brass bands as an essential component (ibid., p.148). Thus the brass band as a signifier of national identity, marking commemorations of national independence, came to be shared by both Americans and Canadians in this region, even though it signified different national identities on the two sides of the border. The feeling of group solidarity conveyed by a brass band was not, in and of itself, inseparably tied to any particular group: it could be applied to any imagined community, large or small, depending upon the location and context of the performance.

IV. Opposing Views

As massively successful as the brass band movement was, there were some who looked upon it with skepticism, and especially on its role in stoking nationalist and militarist passions. Henry David Thoreau, writing in his cabin in the woods near Concord, Massachusetts (just south of New Hampshire) in the late 1840s, described the experience of hearing

on festive occasions the sound of military music wafting over the woods from the nearby town:

On gala days the town fires its great guns, which echo like popguns to these woods, and some waifs of martial music occasionally penetrate thus far.... It seemed by the distant hum as if somebody's bees had swarmed, and that the neighbors ... by a faint *tintinnabulum* upon the most sonorous of their domestic utensils, were endeavoring to call them down into the hive again. (Thoreau 1966 (1854), p.107)

We noted earlier the use of cannons ("great guns") as sound instruments on festive days in Portsmouth; this seems to have been a widespread practice. Thoreau finds it to be about as weighty and dignified as the sound of children playing with toy popguns. Similarly, the distant sound of brass instruments sounds to Thoreau's ears like the buzzing of bees, and percussion instruments like people beating on pots and pans, comparisons which suggest just how much seriousness he attaches to these martial festivities.

As he continues his reflections on the distant sound of military music, however, he observes its effects on himself in terms that are both humorous and disturbing:

When there were several bands of musicians, it sounded as if all the village was a vast bellows, and all the buildings expanded and collapsed alternately with a din. But sometimes it was a really noble and inspiring strain that reached these woods, and the trumpet that sings of fame, and I felt as if I could spit a Mexican with a good relish, — for why should we always stand for trifles? — and looked round for a woodchuck or a skunk to exercise my chivalry upon. (ibid., p.107)

Through this ironic commentary on his own emotional response, Thoreau makes his readers aware of the potential of martial music to promote violence, and perhaps suggests that it had indeed played a role in recent violent events - namely the war with Mexico, which Thoreau (like many New Englanders) vehemently opposed. Thoreau's opposition to the war was in fact a major reason for his refusal to pay the poll tax and for his resulting one-night imprisonment in the Concord jail in 1846, the experience that gave rise to his famous essay on Civil Disobedience (Thoreau 1966 (1854)).

At around the same time, University of Vermont students in 1847 also expressed their opposition to the Mexican war (and to the requirement that they undergo militia training) by carrying out mock military maneuvers, dressed in homemade "uniforms" based on ancient Greek and Roman attire and carrying mock weapons made from old stovepipes. Their high-spirited parody of military marching was accompanied, naturally enough, by a brass band (Thomas 2002, pp.107-8). This rebellious ritual, known as "June Training," became an annual event that drew large numbers of students in subsequent years, some of whom contributed a parody of brass band music by blowing tin horns and beating on pots and pans.

In 1855 the June Training parade was finally banned by the University faculty, after some students fired a practice cannon at the college and blew out many of its windows (a subversive use of a sound instrument we have noted earlier: the cannon as festive noisemaker). But students nevertheless went ahead with one final parade in 1856. This time they staged a funeral procession for June Training led by a band playing solemn music, and buried a coffin containing the “skeleton” of June Training in the town common. The burial was accompanied by readings from appropriate literature, including Thoreau’s essay on Civil Disobedience (*ibid.*, pp.116-7). It seems that Thoreau’s writings had rapidly become known at least among the members of a small anti-war subculture in New England, who shared not only his ideas about resistance to authority but also his ironic and irreverent attitude toward military music.

V. The Civil War

In 1861, when the American Civil War broke out, brass bands were flourishing across the United States. Army leaders on both sides of the conflict placed great importance on military music, and vigorously recruited musicians as well as soldiers. According to one estimate the Union army eventually had 500 bands employing 9000 musicians, in addition to field musicians (Camus 2001a, p.636). Among these were numerous bands and individual musicians from New Hampshire. Some town bands in the state, such as the famous Fisherville Cornet Band, found themselves with too few members and had to stop performing during the war. Other bands managed to carry on, providing local entertainment and playing for rallies and benefit concerts in support of the troops (Spicer 1999, p.34). In many cases entire civilian bands enlisted and were transformed into military bands; one of these was Walter Dignam’s Manchester Cornet Band, mentioned above as having played at the centennial of printing in Portsmouth in 1856.

Another New Hampshire military ensemble whose members came from earlier town bands was the Third New Hampshire Regiment Band, led by Gustavus W. Ingalls. With some changes in membership this band became the Hilton Head Post Band, stationed from 1863 to 1865 on the island of Hilton Head, South Carolina, which had been captured by Union forces early in the war. The band spent the war years on Hilton Head in relative peace, playing for “drills, dress parades, and troop reviews; serenading the officers and serving at their often frequent requests for private gatherings; weekly concerts at the hospital and at the end of the pier; and providing solemn accompaniment for funerals and an occasional execution” (Spicer 1999, p.28). This list suggests the wide range of contexts in which military bands helped to regulate the emotional flow of an army’s daily life, in this case an army not engaged in actual fighting. Regarding the Third Regiment band’s performances, one soldier commented: “’Twas an inspiration to all who stepped to its music, whether at dress parade, review, or on the march. The weariness of a march was largely diminished by its cheering notes.” In June 1862, when the regiment was sent on an exhausting reconnaissance mission

to St. John's island, another soldier wrote, "We were weary, nigh unto death ... but the music of the band as it struck upon our ears in that dismal, dreary, God-forsaken place, lifted us at once out of our weariness and cheered us along...." (quoted in Spicer 1999, p.28).

These first-hand accounts remind us that the purpose of military music is not only to inspire war spirit as such; perhaps more importantly, it serves to revive flagging energy and morale during the exhausting marches and other hardships that soldiers have to endure. Or to put it another way, military music is (among other things) a means through which military authorities can exercise various kinds of psychological control over soldiers, without which the execution of a war might be exceedingly difficult. This function of military music might be seen as a precursor to the use of background music in factories to keep workers lively and productive, or in shops and supermarkets of music carefully selected so as to encourage either leisurely shopping or impulse buying.⁽²⁾ Such psychological control is not necessarily coercive — soldiers, factory workers and shoppers may all listen willingly, and be quite pleased with the music and its effects — but it is deliberately manipulative, nevertheless. It seems likely that military bands were especially effective in relieving the weariness of Civil War soldiers because similar bands were already active and popular throughout the U. S. Many soldiers had been hearing band music for years before the war, and they may have found it "cheering" in part because it reminded them of parades and pleasant summer afternoons in their home towns.

The Third New Hampshire Regiment and Hilton Head Post bands were outstanding bands by all accounts. After the war ended the members returned to New Hampshire, where many became active in community bands, and at least five went on to become band leaders (Spicer 1999, pp.34-5). The story of these bands is thus a prime example of the extensive interaction between the military and civilian musical worlds which characterized the Civil War period. The war brought large numbers of community musicians into the military, where they received training and intensive experience; later they returned to civilian life and in many cases made use of that experience in amateur or professional musical activities.

A final point of interest regarding the Hilton Head Post Band is the case of Billy Seabrook (also known as William Butler), an African American refugee slave who remained on the island after his white owners had fled. He was befriended by the band members, and appears with them in an 1862 group photograph leaning on the bass drum. One soldier wrote of him in a letter, "He is a bright, intelligent negro, and has already learned to spell and read many words correctly. He has been provided with a uniform and carries the bass drum" (quoted in Spicer 1999, p.36). What became of him after the war is not recorded, and it is not clear whether he played the bass drum as well as carrying it, but Seabrook's presence is notable because he is the only African American who I have seen mentioned in association with a New Hampshire band in the nineteenth century. In the antebellum period there were numerous all-black bands, both civilian and military, in other parts of the country, including several in New York, and those led by the famous and influential Frank Johnson in Philadelphia (Southern 1983, p.110). Whether African American bands were not active in New

Hampshire or whether their activities have simply not yet been uncovered by researchers is an open question.

VI. The Crescendo of the Band Movement

In the years following the Civil War, the number of civilian bands in the U. S. increased dramatically as former army musicians returned home and joined existing bands or established new ones in their communities. In 1889 it was estimated that there were over 10,000 bands in the country, many of which were civilian bands with connections to local militias (Camus 2001a, p.636; Proper 1998, p.167). As before, bands were thriving in the cultural border area between the civilian and military worlds. The late nineteenth century was the peak of the band movement in the U. S., when “the town band enjoyed unparalleled prestige and influence throughout New England and in the country at large...” (Proper 1998, p.162). In smaller cities and towns, military and civilian bands were among the most prominent, and sometimes the only, formal musical organizations. In addition to ceremonies and parades, professional and amateur bands performed at “concerts, amusement parks, seaside resorts, county and state fairs, and national and international expositions” (Camus 2001a, p.636). Elaborate bandstands became an architectural hallmark of small-town America. As it grew the band movement continued to be an overwhelmingly male phenomenon, but by the turn of the century even this had begun to change, and in 1900 Helen May Butler established a Ladies’ Military Band (later the Ladies’ Brass Band) in Providence, Rhode Island (Proper 1998, p.172; Camus 2001a, p.639).

In New Hampshire, long-established bands continued to prosper and new ones sprang up across the state. Proper (1998, p.167) quotes musicians of this period from two New Hampshire towns who recall that many boys and young men longed to join bands, and that some towns had to put prospective members on waiting lists. What motivated them evidently was not only a desire to play music, but a desire to be *seen* playing music, as part of an impressively uniformed band. Uniforms, together with the instruments themselves, created a visual appeal that may have contributed as much as the music to a band’s attractiveness. The second half of the nineteenth century was also the age when photography became commonplace, and group photographs of bands seem to have been a popular way to capture their visual appeal for posterity. Proper (1998) reproduces photographs of bands from nine New Hampshire towns — Hinsdale, Peterborough, Franconia Notch, Marlow, East Sullivan, Jaffrey, Hancock, Fitzwilliam, and Alstead — taken between 1855 and 1920. All are in uniform with instruments prominently displayed; most are standing on or in front of a bandstand, or in front of some imposing building; after 1889 most have the band’s name painted in bold letters on the bass drum.

A band came to be considered a strong cultural asset and even a sign of community virtue. In 1875 one observer commented:

It is a fact not to be denied that the existence of a good brass band in any town or community is at once an indication of enterprise among its people, and an evidence that a certain spirit of taste and refinement pervades the masses. (Quoted in Camus 2001b, p.645)

In a similar vein, W. H. Dana wrote that “the spirit of a place is recognized in its band,” while Sherwood Anderson commented “What does a band mean to a town? Better ask what is a town without a band” (quoted in Proper 1998, pp.163-4). Bands were seen as almost indispensable to the life of a town and an expression of its very identity; and public expressions of town identity often coincided (as they had since before the war) with expressions of national identity, such as Fourth of July celebrations. On such occasions the town band evoked patriotic devotion to both the town and the nation simultaneously.

Town bands drew inspiration and repertoire from nationally famous professional bands, led by those of Patrick S. Gilmore and (from 1892) John Philip Sousa, which toured the country continuously playing marches, waltzes, popular song melodies, patriotic tunes, and overtures from classical pieces - a mixture of military, popular, and light classical music, with a nationalistic tint. Gilmore re-introduced woodwind instruments into his band, and many other professional and amateur bands followed his example, so that the all-brass format declined throughout the country (Camus 2001b, p.645). Professional bands could also be heard in abundance at national fairs and expositions, such as the Centennial celebration of 1876 in Philadelphia and the World Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. Music for both of those events was planned and organized by Theodore Thomas, who did his best to introduce the masses to classical music; but they flocked to band concerts instead. When asked his advice for the exposition to be held in St. Louis in 1904, Thomas answered simply “Have a lot of band music, out of doors” (Sablosky 1969, p.102).

In addition to the attractive role models provided by professional bands, other reasons for the proliferation of amateur bands include the availability of better and less expensive instruments than in the past; aggressive advertising by musical instrument makers; and rivalries between towns. Although less expensive than before, band instruments were still costly, and local businesses usually put up the money to buy a set of instruments for the town band. In Jaffrey, New Hampshire, a group of citizens formed an association and sold shares to raise money for band equipment, promising to distribute dividends from the proceeds of an annual “levee” (Proper 1998, pp.167-8). The growing U. S. music industry eagerly marketed instruments, sheet music, instruction books, and uniforms to bands and their members. A band became in some ways the public face and voice of a town, especially when it performed in other towns or at regional fairs alongside other bands. In such a situation it is not surprising that inter-town rivalries developed, and that to be a sizeable town with no band was a prospect too embarrassing even to contemplate.

Meanwhile, the association of bands with the military and with public authority

continued to make them an attractive target for satire and carnivalesque mimicry. One example from Portsmouth appears in relation to the long tradition of “Pope Nights.”

In mainly Protestant New England, a tradition of satirical derision was directed at the authority of the Pope in the Roman Catholic Church. “Pope Nights” were held on November 5th of each year to commemorate the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, when a plot by Catholic dissidents to blow up the Houses of Parliament in London was foiled. An anti-Catholic festival that spread from England to the ports of New England, Pope Night centered on effigies of the Pope, the devil, and other unpopular figures which were paraded through the streets and finally burned in a great bonfire. This annual event was “the only known instance in eighteenth-century New England history where authorities countenanced a combination of street theater, masquerade costumes, and a riotous carnival atmosphere” (Benes 2002, p.11). The riotous atmosphere was enhanced by bells, horns, and other instruments. The celebrations ceased in the late 18th century, but were later revived in some locations. In Portsmouth a vestige of the Pope Nights tradition continued into the 1890s; on “Pork Night,” as it was then called, bands with tin horns marched through the streets and “made the night hideous with their music” (ibid., p.25). Hideous may have been exactly the intended effect. In the midst of the nationwide band fervor, mock brass bands with tin horns must have suited perfectly the satirical and disruptive tone of the event.⁽³⁾

VII. Band Music at the Portsmouth Peace Conference

The Portsmouth Peace Conference of 1905, convened by President Theodore Roosevelt, brought an end to the Russo-Japanese War and incidentally thrust the town of Portsmouth for a short time onto the center of the world stage. For the people of the town, the United States was now imagined, and even experienced quite directly, not only as the larger community that contained New Hampshire, but also as one member of a still larger world community of nations. Several bands were on hand to provide a soundtrack to this experience.

During the summer leading up to the treaty negotiations there was a plentiful supply of public band music. The Portsmouth City Band gave a concert on July Fourth, as it did every year. The Second U. S. Artillery Corps Band, from Portland, Maine, was in the area for two weeks in July, playing public concerts and providing music for baseball games (Spicer 2007, p.3). Music specifically accompanying the treaty negotiations, however, was provided by other military bands. When the Russian and Japanese delegates arrived in Portsmouth by sea on August 8th, they were welcomed by a variety of naval ships assembled for the occasion, and music played by the bands aboard these ships “sounded especially pretty on the water,” according to a report in the *Portsmouth Herald* (quoted in Spicer 2007, p.4). The delegates were then transported to the Portsmouth Navy Yard, where the negotiations were to be held, and the Navy Yard Band performed there at a brief ceremony as they came ashore. Band music was part of diplomatic protocol, but it was also ideally suited to the occasion: the

volume of the music made it possible for bands playing on ships in the harbor to be heard by the diplomats themselves and by spectators on the shore.

On the afternoon of August 8th, the delegates were transported in a welcoming parade through the city of Portsmouth to the Rockingham County Courthouse, where they were greeted by the mayor and by the governor of New Hampshire. In the parade they were preceded by the Second Regiment Band of Concord, New Hampshire, whose “excellent marching music” was praised by a writer for the *Portsmouth Herald* (Spicer 2007, p.5).

On the following day, August 9th, yet another military band arrived in Portsmouth: the Tenth Army Artillery Corps band, brought up from Boston for the express purpose of entertaining the delegates. They performed at the Hotel Wentworth, where the delegates were housed (Robinson 2004, p.109), and at dinner parties hosted by assistant secretary of state Pierce and his wife. Soon after they arrived, this band was requested by the mayor to perform for the people of Portsmouth as well, and the band obliged with twice weekly concerts for the next four weeks, to hearty applause and critical acclaim in the local newspapers (Spicer 2007, p.4).

Band music was thus a constant accompaniment to the conference, for delegates and townspeople alike. Perhaps most remarkably, it was a musical genre that all who were present could understand and appreciate. By the turn of the century military band music was the closest thing in existence to a musical “universal language,” having been carried to most corners of the globe by European colonial armies (see Flaes 2000) and by European music instructors. It had been introduced to Japan in the 1870s and 80s by English, French, and German bandmasters, and was by now well established there (Tsukahara 2001). In Russia, 19th century military music had developed under German influence (Suppan 2001, p. 633). Thus it was a language through which the host of the conference, the United States, could demonstrate proper respect for the nations of Japan and Russia (respect which Japan, in particular, had long struggled to secure from Western countries, establishing its own military bands as one part of that struggle). But American bands also represented U. S. power as the host country, helping to establish the U. S. as a formidable player in geopolitical affairs, a process that had taken a major step forward with the Spanish-American War seven years earlier. Military band music was the premier auditory symbol of international status and prestige, and Roosevelt’s conference organizers employed it effectively.

At the same time, band music was a major part of this heady and memorable experience for the people of Portsmouth, and in later years band music has helped to shape the collective memory of that experience. In 1906 and 1907, concerts were held to commemorate the peace conference by the Navy Yard band and other local bands. More recently, in keeping with the long Portsmouth tradition of defining and redefining itself through centennial celebrations, a series of events was held in 2005 to commemorate the centennial of the Portsmouth Peace Conference. Like the Portsmouth centennials of the 19th century discussed above, this one also included band performances, but in this case the band performances of 1905 were themselves a part of the history to be commemorated. Accordingly, one of several concerts

held in the summer of 2005 featured Nevers' Second Regiment Band, the direct descendant of the Second Regiment Band that had led the parade that welcomed the peace conference delegates a hundred years earlier. The concert consisted of pieces that had actually been played at band concerts in Portsmouth during the summer of 1905.⁽⁴⁾

Richard C. Spicer, whose research uncovered the music played in 1905 and who organized the 2005 concert, later became the conductor of the Seacoast Wind Ensemble, a community concert band based in the Portsmouth area. In this capacity he has begun putting on a series of annual concerts commemorating the 1905 peace conference. The first of these, held on June 24, 2007, again made use of music actually played during and after the peace conference, and was entitled "Serenade for World Peace: Best of the Band Concerts of 1905-7" (Spicer 2007). Thus band music continues to play a role in the ongoing process through which Portsmouth, New Hampshire revives and reinvents its historical identity.

VIII. Modern Times: Bands as Local History

With the rise of radio and the record industry in the 1920s, new styles of popular music and new ways of listening to popular music came to dominate American musical life, and the brass band movement went into decline. Military bands continued to perform their official duties as before, but their popularity among the civilian population gradually dwindled. John Philip Sousa, the embodiment of the band movement and by far its best remembered representative today, looked with disdain on records and radio, and agreed to perform for radio broadcasts only with the greatest reluctance (Lanza 1994, p.13). Perhaps he saw that these new technologies spelled the end of his era. Over a period of decades, band performances had acquired meaning as live events, bringing people together in outdoor spaces on significant public occasions, with music as part of a total experience and almost inseparable from the uniforms, shining instruments and other visual trappings. On records or radio they could be no more than a shadow of what they were meant to be.

Civilian bands survived and prospered largely in connection with schools and sports activities, "drumming up" enthusiasm for football and basketball teams in high schools and colleges. The stylized warfare of sports contests became the focus for a restrained version of the emotions associated with war, and those emotions were incited and directed by roughly the same types of bands playing roughly the same types of music that military bands had used since the 19th century.

A new international trend in U. S. brass band music emerged in 1982, when a movement was initiated to introduce British-style brass bands to the U. S. The North American Brass Band Association (NABBA) was established in 1983 for this purpose, and it continues to hold annual competitions (Camus 2001b, p.645). The ground for this "British Invasion" may have been prepared to some extent by the Beatles' 1967 album *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, a milestone in popular music history for Americans as well as Britons, which evoked a rather nostalgic but colorful image of a British brass band and established that

image in the American consciousness.

New England towns have placed a renewed emphasis on local history, both for the promotion of tourism and for the promotion of a sense of community identity among local residents. Brass bands and other wind bands, thanks to their close association with New England's past, have carried on and renewed their role as symbols of community identity, an identity that is now defined in large part through nostalgia. I define nostalgia broadly as "pleasure in the past," or cultural products that evoke pleasure in the past, and I do not intend it as a derogatory term.⁽⁵⁾ Nostalgia is manifested in New England by historical societies (such as the Portsmouth Athenaeum) and restored historical buildings as well as by local bands, and it is directed both toward local community insiders and toward outside visitors, the tourists who have become a mainstay of New England's economy.

Most of the old town bands have disappeared, but by no means all of them. Several New Hampshire bands of the 19th century have remained active up to the present day. The Exeter Town Band, formed in 1847, is one of these, and its library of band music accumulated over a century and a half is an important source for musicians and researchers today. The Second Regiment Band of Concord, formed in 1879, which led the welcoming parade for the Portsmouth Peace Conference delegates in 1905, continues to perform today as Nevers' Second Regiment Band, no longer a military band but a community band in the town of Concord (Spicer 2007, p.5). The long histories of bands such as these make them living connections between the present and the past for the New Hampshire towns that support them, and they help to support the towns by attracting tourists. In Portsmouth, meanwhile, annual commemorative concerts for the 1905 peace conference continue. To people of New Hampshire today, band music is a part of their history, a medium through which to remember history, and also a part of their economic life in the present.

IX. Conclusions

We have seen that over the past three centuries of New Hampshire history, bands and related instrumental performances have functioned as symbols of power and of community in a variety of ways and in a variety of contexts. During this period the balance between these two general (and interrelated) domains of meaning has shifted considerably. In colonial times the signification of power seems to have been especially strong: instruments were used for signaling commands in militia training, which was required for most men, and also for signaling in civil communities, while military bands were the leading if not the only instrumental ensembles in most areas. In the nineteenth century, both military and civilian bands played a major role in public celebrations that shaped the ways in which various levels of community, from the town to the nation, were imagined. Here the symbolic power of bands gave emotional force to emerging ideas of community identity. In the twentieth century town bands became more clearly separate from military bands, and their function as symbols of community, with implications of historical identity rather than community power,

have moved to the forefront.

From about the 1830s through the time of the Civil War and into the early twentieth century, the popularity of brass bands and other wind bands created a substantial confluence of military and civilian music cultures in the U. S. Thus in Portsmouth in 1905 both military and civilian bands were present, doing more or less the same kinds of music, all reviewed and compared in the same local newspapers. The military bands that played for official peace conference ceremonies and to entertain the delegates also played for the people of Portsmouth, who were also entertained by civilian bands around the same time.

This musical confluence reflected and reinforced a broader ideological confluence of military and civilian life generally. The military ideals of discipline and resolute patriotism were held up as civic virtues as well, and brass bands were visual, aural, and social symbols of these ideals in both the military and the civilian worlds. Town bands were strongly supported in part because they were thought to instill in local citizens ideals of discipline and order that had close affinities to military ideals.

In the twentieth century, new mass media and the diversification of entertainment and leisure activities led to a sharp decline in the importance of military-related music in civilian life. With the emergence of jazz, swing, and later rock'n'roll, musical styles that were massively popular among young people but profoundly unpopular among many older and more conservative Americans, the apparent unity of musical taste and harmony of social life represented by brass bands disappeared. The unity and harmony were perhaps never more than apparent: as we have seen, military organizations and their bands were already objects of satire and ironic criticism in the 19th century. But the social and musical changes of the twentieth century made even the appearance of unity impossible to maintain.

It also seems fair to say that since the early 20th century, as a result of technological changes, the capacity of bands and related instruments to signify power has diminished. They have lost their commanding position in the world's soundscapes, even in wartime. Cannons, of course, were always louder than any band, and were used not only as weapons, but also, as we have seen, as sound-producing instruments in peacetime celebrations. With the advent of airplanes and tanks, however, military bands could be sonically vanquished not only by cannons but also by many other kinds of military equipment, and as a result they probably lost the forceful and even intimidating effect they had once had. In concerts and festivals as well as on battlefields, technology has shifted the balance: the arrival of amplified rock bands has greatly diminished the position of brass and other wind bands as musical symbols of power. At outdoor events, a band can be at least partially drowned out by an airplane or a helicopter passing overhead, or even by a large truck on a nearby road. Brass bands were once the loudest things in town, but no longer. What remained, then, was their place as symbols of community, which they have continued to signify with an increasing tinge of nostalgia.

But even as signifiers of community, their relative importance has declined. Musical taste and musical culture have changed dramatically over the past hundred years, and bands

have been shifted away from the mainstream. Today it is quite possible (and indeed very common) to hold a public celebration in the U. S. without band music; in the late nineteenth century, this was almost unthinkable.

In New Hampshire, however, with its strong emphasis on local history and assertiveness in using that history to promote tourism, the signification of community identity, now with an emphasis on nostalgia, remains an important function of bands. The evocation of the past in New England towns, as we have seen, is itself nothing new: Portsmouth in the 1820s, for example, already had a historical society, and was already using commemorative events to celebrate its historical identity. But whereas band music at that time (and through the early twentieth century) was an element of contemporary culture used for virtually all public celebrations, including commemorative ones, band music today is itself widely felt to be nostalgic. As new genres of music have taken over the mainstream, band music has lost its dominant position but has acquired a new role as a potent signifier of the past.

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Notes

- (1) Eventually meeting houses were equipped with bells, which replaced drums as the main instrument for signaling assembly (Pichierri 1960, p.14). Even today the bell in the church steeple continues to be a familiar aural symbol of small-town America, and of New England towns in particular.
- (2) See Lanza 1994 for an in-depth look at modern forms of psychological control through background music.
- (3) This Portsmouth tradition, which also included "boys carrying pumpkin lanterns and ringing doorbells," was later absorbed by the adjacent festival of Halloween (Benes 2002, p.25).
- (4) Personal communication from Richard C. Spicer.
- (5) This definition of nostalgia parallels my definition of exoticism, which I have discussed elsewhere (Pope 2003).

[Abstract]

Sounds of Power and Community: The Meanings of Band Music in New Hampshire

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In this paper I offer a brief exploration and preliminary analysis of the history of wind bands and their activities in New Hampshire, a state in the northeastern United States, from the early seventeenth century to the present. My interpretations focus on the social and cultural meanings of bands, and on how these have changed over time as bands have pursued their changing roles in the military and civilian worlds. I view bands as symbols that have tended to convey both an impression of power and a sense of community, and suggest that these two meanings have been used and responded to in a variety of ways over the centuries. I conclude that in general the symbolism of power has declined, while the symbolism of community has been reshaped in modern times as bands have themselves become a part of the historical self-images fashioned by New Hampshire towns.

Key words: wind band, brass band, military band, New Hampshire